Scholars World
INTERNATIONAL PEER REVIEWED REFEREED MULTIDISCIPLINARY JOURNAL OF CONTEMPORARY REASERCH
Impact Factor: 4.433
Online ISSN: 2320-3145, Print ISSN: 2319-5789

A Journey of Higher Education and Its Challenges

Mr. Devidas Dattu Sonawane

Research Scholar
Department of English & Research Center, MGV's Loknete Vyankatrao Hiray Arts, Science and Commerce College, Panchavati Tal: Nashik Dist: Nashik Maharashtra, India-422003
Assistant Professor
Department of English, Karmaveer Ramraoji Aher Arts, Science and Commerce College, Deola , Tal-Deola, Dist-Nashik, Maharashtra, India-423102

Abstract:

India has a rich tradition of educational systems from the ancient times to the modern era. The nature of the educational system appears to have undergone a continuous transformation. However, the educational system has also faced various challenges. During the ancient and medieval periods, opportunities for education were available only to specific sections of society. In the modern era, particularly in the British Rule in India, there were a lots of educational reforms. The British endeavored to transform India's discriminatory social structure into a system based on equality. In the pre-independence era, Christian missionaries and social reformers played a pivotal role in the dissemination of education. After the independence, the government established numerous committees and commissions to implement reforms in higher education; over the past 75 years, these bodies have formulated the framework and regulations governing the higher education sector. These commissions have played a crucial role in ensuring that higher education remains relevant and aligned with contemporary needs. The present article presents an overview of the entire educational journey and the challenges encountered along the way.

Keywords: Higher Education, University Grants Commission (UGC), National Education Policy (NEP), Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER), Funding, Infrastructure, Research Institutions, Governance, Administration, University Density, Online Education.

Introduction:

In the ancient times, the 'Gurukul' system of education was the major source of the education. A disciple would travel to a 'Gurukul' to reside with a 'Guru' (teacher) and acquire knowledge. This education encompassed subjects such as literature, religion, warfare, and statecraft (administration), with knowledge being imparted through both oral as well as practical methods. There were several universities in the ancient time like Takshashila, Nalanda. These universities were globally celebrated for its excellence in medicine, politics, martial arts, and philosophy. Scholars such as Chanakya, Panini, and Jivaka studied and taught at this institution. During the medieval period, the 'Varna' (class) system emerged. This system was predicated upon the 'Chaturvarnya' (four-fold) social order. Individuals belonging to the so-called 'lower' 'Varnas' and castes were denied the right to acquire education or knowledge. Consequently, a significant segment of society remained deprived of access to this historically rich and profound tradition of knowledge.
In the British Rule, there were changes in the social structure and the means of production. Lord Macaulay introduced the modern education system. The changes proposed by Macaulay placed a strong emphasis on classroom-based education. Macaulay advocated for an educational system delivered through the mediums of Western education, science, and the English language. Instead of Sanskrit and Arabic literature, the focus shifted to teaching Western science and literature. The primary objective of the educational system was to create a workforce capable of assisting the British administration in India. During the pre-independence era, Christian missionaries and numerous social reformers started the significant task of disseminating education. During the Non-Cooperation Movement, a strong emphasis was placed on 'National Education.' The fundamental aim of this initiative was to oppose English-medium education and, try to adopt and propagate an indigenous Indian system of education. After the independence, several committees and

commissions were constituted to implement reforms within the higher education sector. Over the past 75 years, these committees and commissions have formulated the frameworks and regulations governing higher education. Notable among these bodies are the following committees and commissions:

After the independence, the Government of India established the first commission dedicated to higher education, under the chairmanship of Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan. The primary objective of this commission was to undertake an evaluation and restructuring of university-level education. The Commission expressed the expectation that the objective of education should be to foster great personalities capable of contributing to the fields of politics, administration, industry, and commerce. The University Grants Commission (UGC) was established after the recommendations of this Commission.

"The Education Commission' was established under the chairmanship of Daulat Singh Kothari on July 14, 1964, It was an ad-hoc commission constituted by the Government of India to examine all facets of the educational sector within the country and to provide guidelines, policies, and advice for the development of education in India. The Kothari Commission's report focused on "Education and National Development." The Commission submitted its report on June 29, 1966. The Kothari Commission's report is regarded as a foundational document that has influenced subsequent education policies; it laid the groundwork for a national educational framework that remains relevant to this day. The Mudaliar Commission was established on September 23, 1952, under the chairmanship of Dr. A. Lakshmanaswami Mudaliar. The Commission focused the need for diverse curricula at the secondary education level. Furthermore, it recommended structural reforms in teacher training and examination systems, diversification of the curriculum, the promotion of vocational education, and the establishment of "Multipurpose Schools."

The National Policy on Education (NPE), introduced by the Rajiv Gandhi government in 1986. It was implemented with the aim of improving the quality of education in India, eliminating social disparities, and ensuring equal educational opportunities for all. The Open University system was introduced to expand opportunities for higher education, Following extensive consultations with numerous committees and education experts, the current government led by Narendra Modi formulated the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, with the objective of creating an educational ecosystem that is prepared for the future. The policy aims to bring about a transformation in the country's school and higher education systems, replacing the existing policy which is 34 years old (the Education Policy of 1986). A significant change introduced is the restructuring of the educational framework into a 5+3+3+4 pattern. This framework places greater emphasis on fostering students' creativity, innovation, and personality development. Its objectives include prioritizing the mother tongue in primary education, skill development, teacher training, technology-enabled learning. The Indian higher education system currently faces numerous challenges, which are outlined as follows:

Enrollment (Gross Enrollment Ratio): According to the All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE) report for 2021-2022, the Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) in higher education stands at 28.4%, which is slightly lower than that of developed nations. Compared to school-level enrollment, the existing provisions for higher education institutions are insufficient to meet the country's growing demands. It is imperative that the Gross Enrollment Ratio in higher education reaches 50% by the year 2035.

Infrastructure: The lack of adequate infrastructural and physical facilities in public or government institutions is a matter of deep concern. A striking paradox exists in India's Higher Education Institutions (HEIs): while numerous vacancies remain unfilled, candidates holding PhDs or NET qualifications remain unemployed or unable to secure any employment.

Quality: The Government of India is expected to take a proactive stance regarding the quality of education. Universities within the country fail to secure a place among the world's top-ranking universities because the majority of these institutions—both universities and colleges—do not fulfill the fundamental expectations laid down by the University Grants Commission (UGC).

Research Facilities: It appears that adequate focus is not being directed toward research within higher education institutions. The availability of research guides is scarce or limited, and the infrastructural facilities required to conduct research are insufficient. Research students frequently do not receive their stipends or fellowships on time, which severely impacts the progress of their research work. The research emerging from the higher education sector does not appear to be translating into tangible benefits for society.

Funding: Between 2005–06 and 2019–20, expenditure on higher education declined, and the states' share of education spending—relative to their Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP)—has decreased.

Maharashtra leads in higher education funding, followed by Uttar Pradesh and Tamil Nadu. In contrast, states such as Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh, and Nagaland allocate the lowest budgets for higher education. Although the absolute figures for Sikkim and other 'Special Category States' may appear low statistically, when adjusted for population size, these states actually demonstrate a higher per capita investment in higher education. If the criterion of "education expenditure per youth" is applied, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, and Telangana emerge as the top spenders on higher education, while Rajasthan, Punjab, and Chhattisgarh lag behind. In summary, states with higher incomes tend to allocate a smaller proportion of their Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) toward education.

University Density: University density is assessed based on the number of universities per 100,000 eligible individuals in the 18–23 age group. As of 2021–22, this density stood at a national average of 0.8. This ratio is higher (10.3) in states with smaller populations, such as Sikkim, whereas it falls below the national average in populous states like Bihar, Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, and West Bengal. In the United States, the density of higher education institutions is significantly higher.

Political Interference: Political interference in the education sector is on the rise, contributing to the current dismal state of education in India. This predicament is not merely a result of administrative failure; rather, it is the consequence of deeply entrenched political and social apathy.

Digital Divide: The limited availability of online resources creates disparities in educational opportunities. Programs such as distance learning and digital skill development initiatives are particularly impacted by this divide, affecting low-income families and marginalized communities in rural regions.

Disparities in Admissions: According to the All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE) report, the enrollment of women in higher education in India is on the rise; however, efforts to achieve complete gender parity are still ongoing. Women's representation remains lower than that of men in disciplines such as Science, Technology, and Engineering. To achieve true gender equality in higher education, merely increasing enrollment numbers is insufficient; a fundamental shift in the organizational culture of educational institutions is imperative. Consequently, the challenge of gender inequality remains a visible reality within the higher education sector today.

Conclusion:

In summary, India's higher education system faces numerous challenges, such as a low Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER), weak infrastructure, inadequate quality standards, limited research facilities, a low share of education expenditure relative to the Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP), unnecessary administrative and political interference, the digital divide, a shortage of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and universities relative to the population—coupled with their uneven distribution across states, and disparities in access based on socio-economic status and gender. Against the backdrop of these challenges, the implementation of the New Education Policy (NEP) 2020 has commenced. By addressing these challenges and capitalizing on available opportunities, India can transform its higher education sector and emerge as a global knowledge superpower. India aspires to become a global research hub. Universities and research institutions play a pivotal role in driving economic growth through innovation and research. Attracting international students can enhance the prestige of Indian institutions and generate revenue. Furthermore, collaborations with foreign universities can facilitate the exchange of knowledge. Achieving the 2047 vision for higher education is, undoubtedly, a complex undertaking. With the right policies, investments, and initiatives, the sector can emerge as a global leader. By transforming challenges into opportunities and harnessing its inherent potential, India can build a world-class higher education system capable of contributing significantly to the nation's progress and global competitiveness.

References:

1) https://aishe.gov.in/
2) NITI Aayog. (2025), “Expanding Quality of Higher Education through States and State Public Universities.” February, 2025.
3) Malegaonkar, Shanta / Paranjape, Vasudha (Eds.), 2003, *Shikshanvedh: Tracing the Changing Currents of Education*, Rajhans Prakashan, Pune.
4) *Daily Loksatta*. 5) *Daily Lokmat*.